

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**Q:** Today is January 9th, 1996, this is Kathy Willins at Le Connor, Washington, interviewing Daniel W. Muehlman, about the intentional community that he founded. Muehlman is spelled M-U-E-H-L-M-A-N. In what commune, or did you live in more than one community, commune?

**A:** Well, actually, um, in Nashville, I lived in ... um, a successful before we came out here; it was one of the reasons that I believed this might work. Um, and um, gathered some of the core group from that commune, Denny and Gunn, specifically.

**Q:** That's Daniel Denny and Heath Gunn?

**A:** Heath, with an "h". And uh...

**Q:** Did that [commune] have a name?

**A:** No ... Brightwood, yeah, you might—

**Q:** Was this also a college living experience, or was it beyond that?

**A:** Because it was a college living experience, it was quite different than the commune that we brought out here. As a college living experience, people came in from classes and cooked together, so it was a, you know, you were away a good part of the day. The Dome House was obsessive in that there wasn't a moment's rest from anybody! We came together and stayed together.

**Q:** And we're going to call the one here in Le Connor that you, um, started, as ... was the Dome House. Do you want to speak anymore about your trip West, or?

**A:** What the true quest probably was, was um, an attempt to form a society of people that could get along together. I looked to gather a core group of bright stars and slip away from society, as it was, really neglecting the true human nature of the public, of humans. [laughs]

**Q:** Were you influenced by certain writers, people of the time?

**A:** No, not particularly. I was influenced by deals—

**Q:** Of that time?

**A:** Yeah... maybe we should be talking about popular music. I really don't know that the um—

**Q:** The folk music, or the um, rock?

**A:** Rock and roll.

**Q:** Rock and roll, okay. When you speak to the purpose or the ideology -- so there was some purpose to creating--

**A:** Oh, I, uh, at the end of my college career, decided that uh, that the whole business was a shuck, and we really should side-step it, and instead of going on to corporate America, we would slip way, build a sailboat and sail—

**Q:** You had done a masters, you finished your master's thesis?

**A:** No, no I barely, barely escaped from the engineering school.

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**Q:** Your senior paper was on uh--

**A:** On cement boats. Which the material science department held in great disdain. Their idea of ferrous cement as a boat material was laughable. And, they were right in a lot of ways. It's heavy. It's also suited to amateur construction, but not professional. There are a number of drawbacks in it. Um, it's durability, I think, um, is worthwhile, and I think in the end this will be a nice boat: we'll sail around the world before I die. [laughs]

**Q:** In this boat that's outside, undercover? Okay, the names of the people that came with you -- leaders? Founders? But you didn't want to be a leader?

**A:** We um, oh I didn't like being a leader. The idea was mine, and I gathered the people together that did this. The original people that came out were a lot just the people that came out. Hal, Heath, and Dan Denny, weren't any more founders than anybody else. Um, people came later, Bill and Sally, Kit, Jenny Cash.

**Q:** And you were really headed for Canada?

**A:** Well, we thought, yes. I actually had a bad run with the, um, with Nashville: I nearly ended up in the state penitentiary over a pot butt, and I was ready to get out of America. Of course, Canada didn't want us anymore than America did. And once we realized that -- we had a difficult time at the border, we were turned back essentially.

**Q:** Were you carrying drugs at the time?

**A:** No, no. Actually, we were just three guys with too little luggage and too much money. They took one look at us and decided we may be planning just to go on up there and stay, and essentially refused us entry, although they did it under a technicality. It became obvious to us that they didn't want us in Canada, which was just fine, actually. In truth, Canada is even more narrow-minded than Tennessee, perhaps. And Washington, a much better place to end up.

**Q:** Why did you choose here, Scaga [?] Valley, in Le Connor?

**A:** Oh, we came to the state, and this was the receptive area, compared to Aberdeen, Hopium and Swim, Cedrowilly, or, most any other part of the state -- Le Connor was as relaxed and enlightened as it got .

**Q:** Did you go into Le Connor to the taverns and this -- how did you make your assessment of this?

**A:** Um, our general method of assessment was to, to load the Volkswagen up with the same spurly bunch of guys, and go down and get out and wander around town, and see how people reacted to us. Le Connor was, as I say, already colonized by hippies, and they were pretty agreeable. And we stumbled across the Dome House and uh, and decided that um, that that would probably work.

**Q:** And the Dome House was an 1898, um, abandoned farmhouse.

**A:** Essentially, yeah. Cheap, abandoned.

**Q:** And how much was it?

**A:** \$7800 bucks. With three acres.

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**Q:** Three acres and \$7800. Good price.

**A:** A good price.

**Q:** But no electricity... can you describe the electrical wiring of this house and the plumbing?

**A:** Oh, there had been some primitive electricity. I got the idea that nobody had lived in house, really, thirty or forty years. The roof was out, it was basically sinking into the rose bushes. And we should've let it go. But we were young and dumb, and put a lot of energy into saving it, and lo, there it sits. But it was an actually -- a man had built it for his intended, put his passion into it, and was refused.

**Q:** This was one of the Summers family?

**A:** Um, Clarence's great-uncle or something. It broke his heart, and he never lived in the house. Um, this is the way Clarence told it. And there it sat, broken-hearted, till it got us. [laughs]

**Q:** You came to be involved in communal living because of your college experiences and --?

**A:** Well, it had worked, in Nashville. We had a great house for a year and a half. I thought that it was entirely possible that people could get along together in a small group, even though they couldn't get along together in big groups. But I was wrong. [laughs] Actually, you know, you can barely get two people to live together as man and wife! If it wasn't for sex, everybody would be living alone. Not too far away from each other, but alone.

**Q:** Did the community have any ideology, any religious structure, any rituals, ceremonies?

**A:** Oh, there were, we were pot smokers, which was somewhat of a ritual. Uh, you know, we all believed in um, ... I don't know, I think we all believed in rock and roll music. Uh, which is much, you know, actually says much more than you'd assume from today. Crosby, Stills, and Nash, uh, talked about, you know, a better deal than was possibly, probably. We believed maybe it was there to be had.

**Q:** Okay, um, how did the people relate to each other, men to men, women to women--

**A:** We were friends. Like I said, I never had any desire to be a leader. In some instances I was the only one with any mechanical knowledge, and I did some leading in that respect, but um, I really didn't want to be a leader. Um, although, when the struggle came, um, it was so free form that a woman came in from Texas, daughter of politician, Libby, and decided that she'd just take control of it, and do with it what she wanted.

**Q:** This was Libby Drake.

**A:** Libby. She said, "Take your boat and stuff it." And at that point, um, there was some great struggle in the house, between her camp and the people that wanted to build a boat, or essentially, not her camp—

**Q:** This is not a lot, many people -- seven?

**A:** Yeah, well you never understand politics until you see it at the level of seven people. Um, we had house meetings, there were public criticisms. I was hurt so badly I decided I wouldn't play those games, I wouldn't go to the house meetings. Let them criticize me, I didn't want to be there for it. And in the end, there was an outright schism, we um, I said, "Okay, you don't want to build a boat, that's fine. I'm

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

out of here. You all deal with it." Because she had, we had-- Dan Denny and I had bought the house together. She had him in her camp. And I was willing to go over the hill. I said, you know, "Give me my money back, let me go."

**Q:** Was this the time that he put forth the lease, the two years that then done, or--?

**A:** Well, at that point, yes. Actually, he had uh, this was one of the first places where money reared its head. I had gotten a very modest amount of money to start this boat business. I told my father I'd build a 65 foot cement boat with \$12,000. And he was wise enough just to let me try that.

**Q:** Now had your father had boat-building experience?

**A:** No, but her was an engineer. And he knew that you can't build a garage wit \$12,000, and you tell the boat people about it... so, um, we had put a great deal of that money up to buy the house.

**Q:** Your father had his advanced you some money?

**A:** Yes. And um, Dan Denny, at one point, we were arguing about what shape the house would take—

**Q:** Denny had money too?

**A:** He had money too. He had put up half the money to build the house, and he said, "Well, I'll buy your share if you go ahead and put the dome on it." He wanted the dome. He said, "I'll buy you out." And I said, "Okay." And we built the dome on it, and later, then, he tried--, there was some argument about what it was worth. He said, "Well, I'll buy you out," but he never said, "I'll buy you out at a reasonable price," or "I'll pay fair market value," he initially offered \$16,000 for the house with the dome on it. There was a great deal of argument and confusion. I think we eventually sold it to him for about \$18,500, or \$22,000 -- a very small amount of money for a completely rebuilt house and three acres. But that all came down at the time when -- and we had a power struggle for the place, and Denny said, "Well, " he finally said, " I will give you enough money that you can get your original investment out and build the boat," and he said, "you can have two year's lease to build the boat in, and I'll go away." And Dan left and went back to school, Libby went into Le Connor, and poisoned the local hippie population against us, saying, "These people out here are a bunch of work-a-holics." Which is as terrible thing you can convince anybody of! [laughing] She was, in her defense, was a confused person. Chip had found her in an airport and brought her to that commune. She'd never taken a drug in her life or met a hippie before. She started smoking dope and eating LSD and became a counterculture queen, and it was just too much too fast for her little tiny brain. And being a politician's daughter, Lord, did she play the game. She we went through an early power-struggle, and um, and when that shook out, um, the core group decided to build the boat. The house was livable...

**Q:** Okay, now you were furnishing--, you had the money.

**A:** I had \$12,000, and when--, we got that money back out of the house.

**Q:** But the other people were to put their labor in this

**A:** Well, and we were all on the boat. You know, I never had any concept that it was my boat. This was a communal project. And in the end, I tried to give this bugger to anybody that wanted it, and nobody

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

wanted it. But indeed, at the end, it was huge just to move it. A major undertaking. And um, so we commenced to put body and soul into building the boat, and indeed, the core group, at that point, pulled together and uh, and worked like no group ever worked before. We were--, we believed in what we were doing, we were dedicated to it, and uh, people liked their work. I was perfectly willing to let people control the parts they wanted to control. I've never been a real good boss. And for a year there, it was wonderful—

**Q:** The second year?

**A:** Well this was after the house was done. For a year, we started to boat, we had a, there was a great feeling. It ruined me for working with any other group ever since: nobody has ever come up to that level of dedication. And no group ever worked together as well as those people did. But it was a strain. I was happy in my work and dedicated to the idea, and willing to work all the time. I, you know—

**Q:** What if people protested against that, and they wanted some--, a day off, you know physically they-

**A:** There were people that did. And I said, "That's fine with me. Take a day off! Alright, go ahead!" And they said, "Oh, we can't take a day off if you're out there working!" And eventually, in order that they would get day off they'd force me to quit working. And I said, "But I like to work!" But in the end, I quit working for awhile in order that they could have a day off. And you know, of course the day off became as labor intensive as anything, you ended up doing your laundry, and grocery shopping, I don't know. I... I, there were signs of stress. This wasn't, I mean, this was a, a bright and wonderful group of people. They were all in the high end of college graduation, and it rackled on them. Manual labor, especially in Washington, first people encountering their winters, it had its um-- indeed, when we got to the point where we finished the cementing, it fell right damn apart. I never, um, it was amusing, how completely it fell apart. People saw it as a, as a finish point, you know, pivot point, that all was done, and a lot of people bailed—

**Q:** What month did-- okay the lease ended the 31st of August, 1976. Correct? Okay. Was the hull done right close to that time?

**A:** No the hull was done 8 or 10 months before that.

**Kit:** October 17th of 1976.

**Q:** Oh, six months before. Okay. So during that. . after the hull finished—

**A:** We fell apart.

**Q:** You fell apart, no one, you didn't work on the superstructure, or—

**A:** Oh we started in, we put the deck on it, we'd uh, we were plowing ahead,

**Kit:** Tell her who put the deck on it.

**A:** Bill Turner, Jane, Sally was still working a little bit, maybe. Did you bail that point, honey?

**Kit:** I'd bailed by then, yeah. But I know when the summer came and you were building a frame to move it, by that point we were paying for [unintelligible].

**A:** Yeah, and Mark showed up--

**Kit:** And still paying for all the food, I think.

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**A:** Mark showed up and helped and with th -- thankfully, Mark showed up and um, he was fresh blood, and--

**Kit:** You did pay him.

**A:** Well, I didn't pay him much.

**Kit:** That's true, you were paying for his and Cathy's food.

**A:** Uh-huh. Well. And at that point, um, came over here to build this house during that six months, Kit and I decided to get married.

**Q:** And you had bought the adjoining land, or did you split the land?

**A:** No, no. We went to Clarence and said, um, "Would you sell this piece of land, to move here?" And Clarence -- the Summers were wonderful, in that, you know they could've looked at this bunch of hippies and said, "Yuck!" And they didn't, and they were--, we were good to the Summers, very good to the Summers, but I look back and recognize, you know, that there were a lot of people here who were not nearly as um, the local community, some of them quite ugly. We had run-ins with them.

**Q:** You mean people that came -- you had an open-door policy? Or visitors?

**A:** No. Actually, very few local people came in, or had anything to do with us. But for instance, we had three boys that came around and tried to burn it down a number of times.

**Q:** Local fellows?

**A:** Mm-hmm [yes]. They were setting crude firebombs in the thicket in the front yard, and it was just absolutely dry. And it was only by the grace of their small bomb-building capacities and our vigilance that we escaped—

**Q:** Do you think it was a deliberate attempt to burn you out?

**A:** Oh, absolutely. It happened four times.

**Q:** And you knew who they were?

**A:** Actually, everybody else did. I'm convinced that old Mrs. Edenword down here at the corner store put an end to it when she decided what was going on. But Clarence later said that one of the boys died in a car wreck and the other two sort of mellowed after that. But they all knew who it was. This was a very close-knit community. Nobody had moved into or off of the ridge in 30, 40 years. They were, they were um, weren't really ready for us. When Kit and I were to be married, I, we went to the people that run the Recksfield Grange, and actually Clarence said, "You better not try this, let us," they'd belonged to the grange for 20 years. And they went around, and word from the people that ran the grange was that, "If we catch you up on the ridge, behind the grange getting married, we'll have you arrested!" And so, there was some depth of feeling against us here. And of course, being 20 years old and stoned, we didn't pay any attention to those people.

**Q:** Did you even know about it, or was Clarence and the Summers family running interference for you?

**A:** Well actually, they were our big contact. Margaret Summers came over and met us and said, "Hey, you boys go out and pick me a couple buckets of berries, and I'll make you some pie!" And she made us

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

some pies. There were people here that were so good, it was, you know, it balanced the people that were rotten scoundrels.

**Q:** I know John and Arlene Summers that they--

**A:** ...from Nashville, of course, and the farm, a whole bunch of California hippies decided they would get back to the land, and moved to the middle of Tennessee. And most of them ended up in jail.

**Q:** Steven Gass

**A:** That was a far uglier story than ours. Organization on that level was -- actually we had trouble with the law. We had a couple of sheriffs that decided they were going bust us. And uh, they um, they took to dropping in on us without being announced, late at night, you know, they'd show up at ten in the morning and rush past everybody to try to get up the windows to see whether something was going on in the house, carrying their flashlights. Flashlights at ten in the morning, for no other reason than that they were going to batter their way in and arrest for drugs. Um, this may have had a -- when we bought the property, somebody had been growing pot on the back foyer. And there was sheriffs department card stuck on a pencil where the pot had been, saying, "Harvest came a little early for us, come on by the office and pick up your crop." So they, I think, thought it was us. We of course were way, way, way too nervous to grow pot anywhere that close to the property.

**Q:** You grew it somewhere else?

**A:** The Olympic Peninsula. We're talking real paranoia here. Actually we never really were ever successful at it. It was a... it was one of those things. But the sheriff um, they dropped by four or five times, they stopped Jane Warwick and hassled her. And eventually Denny went in and went to the head of the sheriff department and said, "Tell these boys to knock it off, we're going to go to court."

**Kit:** Did he?

**A:** Yeah he did.

**Kit:** Good for him!

**A:** Well, God ... and they tried one more time, after that, and when they didn't get it, they gave up. It was one cop that was just somewhat rabid. I went on to discover that the sheriff daughter died of a drug overdose ... something happened that prejudiced the sheriff against drugs. Something like that.

**Q:** I can't remember who the sheriff was in those days. Blayton was sheriff for many years...

**A:** There was, somebody told me this just recently, that there had been a drug connection like that, that uh, that led to... to probably what happened then, in the sheriff department. It was a sign of the times, this was a farming community. Le Connor was just, gosh, there was the Quads at Hup [?] where the grocery store is now, across from it was a, were six or seven picker shacks that sat in a lake during the winter from undrained water. Main street was only fairly paved, half the storefronts were vacant ... it was a--

**Q:** I've seen the photos from the 1960s--

**A:** It wasn't what it then came to be. There was a thriving hippie community that grew up in town. But like I say, we didn't have much contact with those people until much later.

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**Q:** Okay, that's an interesting point. so were, it would've been expensive to go in and sit in the tavern, you didn't go into the taverns--

**A:** I didn't have a driver's license, they wouldn't let me in the tavern. I was plenty old enough...

**Q:** Did you meet Tom Robins?

**A:** No, I never met Tom Robins.

**Q:** Kit, did you meet any of the--

**Kit:** No, we really didn't know... we didn't have any extra money to go into town to spend, and there wasn't one or the other reason to go -- in fact we did our grocery shopping in Mt. Vernon, you know and our hardware shopping in Mt. Vernon, at the big, cheaper stores, and hardly ever went into Le Connor.

**Q:** But there were a lot of hippies in Le Connor?

**Kit:** Yeah, there were.

**A:** They wouldn't come out to see us much either.

**Kit:** Sometimes they did. There were definitely people who came out -- George Usterman, who owns Riverside Health Club, came out and brought a Volkswagen; the, uh, Dana Rust would come out and visit from time to time, and Kevin Summers would come out to visit. But um, we were working so much. It was really hard to hang out and relax and have a good time when everyone around you is working.

**Q:** So that would've created a whole different atmosphere than if it was just sort of a laid-back, hangout commune? Yeah, okay. So your relationship were mostly with people here on the ridge, did they give you any hassle over septic system. The fact you had an outhouse?

**A:** They made us put the damndest septic system on the house you ever saw.

**Q:** Now who is "they"?

**A:** The zone people. We went in, we went in to the building code people, and they said, "Well, how many people are living there?" and we said, "Seven or eight?" And they said, "Well how many bedrooms is that?" and we said, "Seven or eight." And they said, "Well an eight-bedroom house requires a septic field that --" you know. And they did, they made us put in a 250 foot ditch, and the best perking ground you ever saw. It was absolutely prime. There a sand, gravel and sand part there, that's why, this was a sand pit, this was a gravel pit, this pond, there's an old one right up there. It was great perk, they were just, they were razzing us. But that's you know, the code people do that. If you don't know what to say, when they ask you those questions, because somebody, you know, with a family of seven people, would never have done that.

**Q:** Did you try to seek energy self-sufficiency? You were plugged into electricity

**A:** Um, well, we had a welder. We burned wood for heat, but you can't build something like that without electricity -- you could, but gosh it would be awful. And the--, all sailboats are energy self-sufficient. We looked at it quite closely, many different systems. Um, at the time, we weren't sophisticated enough to try to bring the Dome--, the commune, into that sort of a deal. In truth, solar energy doesn't work here. There are times when you get wind energy, but you better not count on it. We did burn a lot of



Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

firewood, in the Northwest, that's what you do for energy sufficiency, and you hook up to the grid to for you lights. It's a difficult proposition. We looked at both, though, quite closely, and would've gone with wind generation. But you can't do wind generators here; I'm a windsurfer. I know how much of the time the wind blows. And uh, you know, you can only charge your batteries four days a month. So, we tried that one on.

**Q:** Um, let's move on... who were the unforgettable characters?

**A:** They were all unforgettable. Um, the time you live that closely with the seven or 12 people that were there, they all were very strong in their own ways. And unique people. Like I say, we didn't start out with any real dogs. Um, Heath, who was the peacekeeper, and the smartest of the lot of us, kept the peace.

**Kit:** He's living on a nut farm on South Lindsey.

**Q:** You mean like filberts?

**Kit:** Yes.

**Q:** Not an intentional community. Just a filbert farm.

**A:** There were, I tell you it's um, ... Libby, the politician's daughter, Sally, the stubbornest woman I've ever met, love her as I do. I mean when she got an opinion, it was, by God, as good as anybody's. Bill, who seemed like the worst damn bumpkin you'd ever run across, and by the time we really got to looking at him, we decided, no, he might be one of the nicest people there is. He became the welder. Chip Bishop, who was a man who said, "I live every day like I have million years to live." Absolutely not found in reality, that was Chip.

**Q:** Did he stay very long?

**A:** Just long enough to bring us Libby. And then there was uh, there was Jenny White, who Kit brought up from dig, and Jenny got there just as we were entering into the house public criticism phase, and counter group, and she, you know she was interested in staying, and I said, "Well Jenny, you've got to realize this is sort of like jumping into the, a bag of snakes." And she said, "Yeah, that's what intrigues me about it!" I thought, "Oh, God!"

**Q:** So this is two anthropologists, Kit and her friend.

**A:** And Kit, who followed me here. Poor girl. Never got an anthropology paper out of it. And you should've.

**Kit:** And no structure! ... I don't know, rethinking that. There was a—

**Q:** Did you decorate the walls?

**Kit:** In the house? Yeah. We covered the walls with barn wood, um, whatever we did had to be essentially free, you know, artistic expression. But, the dome, the geodesic dome was an extravagant investment of time and materials. And, I mean, putting windows in that was a real creative effort. There was a, little areas cut out of the house, imaginative little attic spaces, and then there were two spiral staircases. There was a spiral staircase in the dome that went around a post in the center that was real effective, and then the other stairway split halfway up, around the fieldstone chimney, went in two

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

directions. There was a ladder up to one attic, and there was a ladder up to the top floor of the dome, which was just a little seating area with windows that opened to the sky.

**Q:** And Dan, did you develop your woodworking abilities there, or did this come later?

**A:** Actually, the, um, I'm a wood butcher. I'm not much of a woodworker. I, you know, my mechanical sense I developed there, and you know, my belief that I could do anything, I taught myself to make chairs because I was interested in small manufacturing processes. It didn't include non-people. And it didn't. I uh, I went on to be very happy working by myself, in a wood shop, which I expected.

**Q:** What was the relationship between psychedelics and community? Were drugs used? Which drugs? How often? By most residents or some?

**A:** Well, most of us smoked pot most of the time. In truth, there were people that were not drug oriented, and there--, I was fairly drug oriented myself. Um, Kit wasn't. I had originally envisioned this boat as a drug dealer's paradise. That was the system that--, yeah, she didn't go along with this. And a lot of the people didn't. But it, the only way you gain economic self-sufficiency had a lot to do with taking the sailboat on one pretty good drug run. And I, at that point, was a pot smoker, and I didn't see anything wrong with pot, still really don't, except it makes you stupid. It's fun, though. ... It was more of what I thought should go on. I didn't see any way that it would pay for itself otherwise. You know, \$12,000 very unreasonable amount of money to expect to support 8 people, and indeed, food became a major part of it.

**Q:** Were you ever short of food?

**A:** Well we didn't eat high on the hog.

**Kit:** We ate too much tuna noodle casserole.

**A:** Brown rice slop.

**Kit:** Oh, too much brown rice!

**A:** We ate very well, actually. Nobody was fat, but everybody--, there was plenty of nutrition, and the... the pot smokers um, were probably in the majority. I uh, .. because I had a lot to do with who came. And like I say, --

**Q:** Did you screen them, then?

**A:** Oh, I didn't screen anybody, it's just your friends are who they are, and most of them were pot smokers.

**Q:** Those were the times.

**A:** And we actually, we grew pot. Actually, Libby, that was part of Libby's program. She had control of the Dome House based a lot on sex. She was a terrible tease. She, you know, I don't think she was every really screwing more than one guy at once, but she was going sweetening on them a little bit, and making real suggestive comments, coming in and sitting on their bed early in the morning. I was amazed at that whole business.

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**Q:** Did that cause any blow-ups within the commune? Did it cause any jealousies?

**A:** Let's see, actually, Chip came back with Libby; Chip had found Libby at an airport, I don't know how. Uh, and Libby recognized that Chip was not the most stable thing, and immediately stop in Bill McHuskey's bed. And uh, when that happened, it broke Chip's heart, and Chip, crying all the time, moved out. Probably just as well -- I wish he'd taken Libby with him. But, yeah, there was some consternation. It was uh... it was to be expected, the hads and the had nots, because it was uh—

**Q:** Was the men and women ratio the same?

**A:** Yes, but that didn't necessarily mean that the women that were there and the men that were there were hooked up! Um, Sally came in and there was some intense competition for Sally between Bill Turner and Felix. And she eventually settled with Bill Turner, and Felix went on down the road. Um, which often happened: once the, once it settled out, then um, the loser felt like they had to beat feet. Um, which was too bad.

**Q:** Did it cause a lot of anger, shouting at each other?

**A:** No, mostly we were too constipated to do it in public.

**Q:** Okay, any other things about daily life that you can remember?

**A:** Daily life?

**Q:** The best and worst things you can remember?

**A:** Oh the best thing of course was the comradeship, the friendship. The worst things were the ... the bad relationships, and the recriminations, and the, you know, it was the best and worst of things, actually, the interpersonal relationships. Um, sometimes with the same people.

**Q:** When did you decide to leave? Was this based on the lease ending?

**A:** No actually, it blew up over, ... well when the boat was cemented, um, half the people bailed: Heath bailed, Kit bailed, Jenny bailed, Hal was already gone, um... I was still working, um, Bill and Sally were heading off. Jane Warwick faithful to the last-- but at that point I decided, I wasn't going to do it with Jane Warwick, and um, I pulled to plug, I said, "Well, I'm, you know." And I came over here and started to build this house and said, "Make the best of communal divorce." Because it was communal divorce.

**Q:** Was that with a lot of sadness?

**A:** Oh, yes, great consternation, huge sense of failure, but also, you know, just a ... by then the emotions had been wrung, everybody had run the thousand laps, we were exhausted. And, I'm still exhausted.

**Q:** Were you glad you did it?

**A:** Oh yeah, this is by far one of the more interesting things anybody ever did out getting out of Vandervilt. Most people got out of Vandervilt, went to work for General Electric. My brother, he went to Phoenix, he worked on a washing machine assembly process for two years—

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**Q:** As an engineer?

**A:** Yeah. And he wasn't [unintelligible] Kit went to dig in New Mexico, you know, and got to be slave labor for somebody else's thesis. ... the pig realized something was up and completely ducked the whole process. We chased him. The pig rolled right over me in the middle of a blackberry bush; hid. We couldn't find it. If it hadn't been for the dog, the dog was just dead blind, but could smell that pig from at least half-mile away, and it didn't-- it was a herding dog, it was a sheep dog. Had no idea of what it was really supposed to do, but it just knew that there was something wrong with that pig being out, and it chased that pig all around the barn, nipping at it behind the ear. And finally the pig was smart, the pig realized the only place it could get away from the dog was back in the pen. It ran back into the electric fence, and got in the pen, where it was safe. And we went around and around about this stupid pig, and eventually, you know, killed it, and cut it up, and put it in, put it in our awful freezer, which, I think worked for about 8 months and then quit, and we lost most of the meat, as I remember it.

**Kit:** Did we?

**A:** I think we lost part of the meat. Didn't work out too well in that respect. But Libby said--, we did Porkchop up, and Libby said, "Look, Prunell is my dear friend, and I can't stand to have you kill her." She said, "I'll pay for her food, if you'll just leave her alive for alive for this one last summer." Now, I don't know whether you ever had a pig, but the pig got about as big as this table. And I'm not kidding, you know, they say you kill them when they're about 300 pounds; the pig was about 750 when we finally decided. And it was a lot like trying to talk a Volkswagen into giving up the ghost, it wasn't going to buy it. And we finally backed it over into a corner and shot it into the head, and it took eleven of us to carry it up to the slaughtering. And it was a huge amount of work. We cut it into pieces with a chainsaw. It was a mess. The thing was, the people that worked in the garden, the garden had to share the fence with the pen, the pig pen. And they have the bottoms of all the vegetables and everything to the pigs. And so the pigs would stand at the fence, and they'd talk while they worked in the garden, you know. It was a real chummy situation. And I didn't blame them a bit, I really didn't want to kill that pig by then either, but let me tell you, there ain't much choice! I could see that if that pig went on for another couple of years, it was going to be as big as an aircraft carrier, and nobody was going to be able to take it out then, short of nuclear attack missiles! It was just, it was an ugly situation that got away from us! And, you know, it starts with this cheap rationalization where you say, "Well, if we're going to kill animals and eat them, we might as well at least be honest about it. And in truth, the only way most people can eat animals is because they come on little Styrofoam trays, covered with shrink wrap. If you, if everybody had to kill that chicken right before dinner, there wouldn't be a lot of chicken eating! Or they'd be used to it. But we weren't used to it. We really; and of course, you know, wasn't anything like an acid trip to make you, make you think that you're not going to be able to kill that pig!

**Q:** Did you raise chickens too, or just the pig?

**A:** We had chickens for awhile.

**Kit:** We did?

**A:** Don't you remember? It ended up we mostly had a rooster or two at the end there.

**Kit:** I think we just had a rooster. Steve had gotten a rooster from somebody, and all we had was a rooster.

Interview with Daniel Muehlman

Interviewer: Kathy Willins

January 9, 1996

**A:** And it was mean, it was mean as a snake. It would attack the children, and it flew up and attacked Bill Turner once; Bill Turner's bigger than any of us. And Turner drop kicked that rooster to the other side of the property. But it was mean, it was a banny, and we finally took it around, and the person we liked least in the world, over on Fern Island, and let it off in front of their house, figuring it was a demon of some sort, and we just let it down the road! Let them try to deal with it. But it, you know, the animals were...

**Q:** Okay, you have photos, and I have a newsletter from this experience. Dan, did you visit any other communes, or did you know about any others?

**A:** We actually, um, I went to visit those surly people at the Kantsuie.

**Q:** That was in Bellingham?

**A:** That was in Bellingham. They were, they actually, they'd probably been up snorting coke for three or four days, and weren't glad to see me. And we went down and visited a boat commune in Oregon. Those people actually looked like they were going to get their boat to the water.

**Q:** Where was that at?

**A:** Um, Wilmet Valley. They went down to Wilmet River to get out. And um, that commune had a powerful, charismatic leader. And it was his theory that that was the only way a commune worked.

**Kit:** Was that Peter?

**A:** Gosh, I've forgotten his name. And he said that the Grateful Dead idea, where everybody just jammed away, was amusing, but that all great communes had had strong leaders, and the minute that they lost that, it fell apart. I didn't want to hear it. I'd be damned if I wanted to be responsible for that horseshow. We were all responsible for that horseshow. And in the end, God I got to take as much blame as anybody, though, gee wiz. It wouldn't have been there if I hadn't called the tune, originally. But like many things in my life, you know, I started off saying "Well, wouldn't it be lovely..." And then, you know, you start down a long chain of events, and you end up like I did this last round, by being a real-estate salesman. It just... it ended, you know, different than I had imagined. I thought we were going to grab this core group of bright stars and break away, and just side-step this whole Americanization of reality. When indeed, you know, we were just too much children of our times to get away. And here I am.

**Q:** ... you had nightmares about it, about the whole thing?

**A:** Oh Lord, yes, you had nightmares about school right? You have nightmares about whatever it is you do; I have real-estate nightmares.

**Q:** But you had commune nightmares? What, they were all coming back to finish the boat?

**A:** No, they had to do with the interpersonal relationships, those and counter-groups. Everybody got together and said, "This sucks, it must be your fault." They rarely were. There are people that are just too mean. It was ... it fried my little bitty brain. I was, I was ready to walk. Actually, I just pulled in my antennas. Retract reality as I knew it.